



Perception and extraordinary objects

Evan Welchance¹ 

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Abstract

I provide a new, perception-based defense of *ordinary ontology*, the thesis that there exist ordinary objects but not extraordinary objects. To that end, I first outline a story about perception and perceptual justification – one informed by recent advances in cognitive science and philosophy of perception – according to which perception gives us reason to countenance ordinary things (Sect. 2). I then argue that extraordinary objects are just the sorts of entities our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect; thus, the fact that we fail to see extraordinary things gives us perceptual reason to repudiate them. I conclude that ordinary ontology is true (Sects. 3–5). In closing, I show that my way of defending ordinary ontology reveals that one of the most prominent objections to ordinary ontology rests on a mistake (Sect. 6).

Keywords Material objects · Ontological permissivism · Ordinary ontology · Extraordinary objects · Perception

1 Introduction

Legend has it that South Jersey’s Pine Barrens house a creature called ‘the Jersey Devil’. Some say the Jersey Devil has the head of a goat, others the head of a horse. Most versions of the tale specify that the Jersey Devil has hooves and wings. No matter the variant of the myth one picks, the Jersey Devil should be a highly visible critter – one well-poised for perceptual detection. To determine whether such a creature exists, then, we should look for it. If we come up empty handed after an exhaustive search, we should conclude that there is no Jersey Devil.

✉ Evan Welchance
evan.welchance@richmond.edu

¹ Department of Philosophy, University of Richmond, Humanities Building, 106 UR Drive, Richmond, VA 23173, USA

I say the same about the *ontological permissivist's* extraordinary objects, things like *trogs* (mereological sums of tree trunks and dogs) and *incars* (objects co-located with cars that cease to exist as cars pass under garage doorways).¹ Incars strike the uninitiated as odd; indeed, some think that extraordinary things so affront ‘common sense’ as to warrant their repudiation.² But cars and incars have one thing in common – they’re both moderate-sized specimens of dry goods (to use J.L. Austin’s phrase).³ Incars are (often) just as big as cars. They share the same shape, color, surface texture, and so forth. Incars, then, seem well-poised for perceptual detection.

Ontological permissivists – who countenance both cars and incars – reply:

[P]ermissivism is itself neutral about such perceptual claims. Even granting, for example, that there are myriad objects that are mereologically co-incident with a [car], it is far from straightforward to conclude that we *see* each of them whenever we see that [car] (Fairchild & Hawthorne, 2018, pp. 46–7).

Permissivists note – surely correctly – that we cannot conclude that we see an incar just because we see the car with which it’s co-located. But I insist that we would expect to see incars, given that they’re mid-sized dry goods. Thus my concern isn’t merely that we *fail to* see incars: it’s that we *should* see them. Combine this with the claim that we don’t see incars (a claim permissivists already find plausible) and permissivism is in trouble. In argument form:

- (E1) If we should see incars but we don’t, then there are no incars.
- (E2) We don’t see incars.
- (E3) We should see incars.
- (E4) Therefore, there are no incars.

Replace ‘incar’ with ‘trog’ and the argument runs just the same. Call (E1)-(E4) ‘the perceptual argument against extraordinary objects’ (hereafter, just ‘the perceptual argument’).

Ordinary ontologists countenance ordinary but not extraordinary objects.⁴ In this paper, I defend ordinary ontology by way of defending the perceptual argument. To that end, I’ll first outline a cognitive scientific story about perception and perceptual justification according to which perception gives us reason to countenance ordinary things (Sect. 2). I’m not the first ontologist who contends that perception furnishes us with such reasons. But I go one further – I claim that perception furnishes us with reasons to *disbelieve* in extraordinary things. For, in the second phase of my defense, I’ll show that the perceptual story on which I rely renders the premises of the perceptual

¹ See Cartwright (1987), Yablo (1987), Sosa (1999), Fine (1999), Sider (2001), Hawthorne (2006), Leslie (2011), Inman (2014), Thomasson (2015), Jago (2016), Fairchild and Hawthorne (2018), Fairchild (2019, 2022), and Dorr et al. (2021, ch. 11) for defenses of permissivism.

² Cf. Hirsch (2002).

³ Cf. Austin (1964).

⁴ Markosian (1998), Lowe (2007), Hirsch (2010), and Korman (2015) defend ordinary ontology. I opt for the label ‘ordinary ontology’ – rather than Korman’s ‘conservatism’ – to avoid any political connotations.

argument highly compelling. We therefore have reasons to countenance the ordinary and to repudiate the extraordinary (Sects. 3–5). I close by showing that my defense of ordinary ontology evades perhaps the most significant objection levied against it – namely, that ordinary ontology is somehow *arbitrary* or *parochial* (Sect. 6).

2 Perception

I maintain that perceptual experience gives us reasons to believe in ordinary objects. A few material object ontologists agree. Daniel Korman writes:

[A] typical experience carries information not just about how sensible qualities are distributed in a situation, but also about which qualities are borne by single objects and about the kinds to which those objects belong. As I turn my attention to the atoms arranged tablewise before me, the content of my experience is *that there is a table that is brown, smooth, etc.*, not simply *that brownness, smoothness, etc., are distributed thus*. On this view of perceptual content, experience directly supports [the existence of tables] (Korman, 2015, p. 31).⁵

Thomas Hofweber concurs:

[T]he perceptual belief that we form on the basis of perceptual experience... has a content that is only true if composition occurs. It has the propositional content that there is a table, say, and that belief, with that content, is only true if there is a table and thus if composition at least sometimes occurs. What we are defeasibly entitled to hold is not just that the world looks as the phenomenology of experience presents it to us to be... but the content of our perceptual beliefs (Hofweber, 2019, p. 33).

And Alex Byrne makes an even stronger claim, writing that “[p]erceptual experience, whether veridical or not, requires the existence of ordinary objects” (2019, p. 8).

Recent work in the philosophy of mind bolsters such remarks. Philosophers of mind concur that if perception justifies any beliefs at all, it justifies certain *demonstrative* beliefs formed on the basis of the information our perceptual apparatus delivers in good perceptual circumstances (cf. Smithies, 2011; Dickie, 2015, ch. 4; Schellenberg, 2018, pt. 4; Burge, 2003, 2020; and Silins, 2024 on perceptual reasons). When we look at brown trees in good lighting, for example, perception delivers a piece of brownness-information permitting us to justifiably believe <That’s brown>. Call these *perceptual demonstrative beliefs* (“PDBs”). I assume that perception justifies PDBs; and PDBs are about composite objects.⁶

⁵ Korman has in mind Siegel (2010)’s view of perceptual content.

⁶ See Comesaña (2020) for more on perceptual reasons. Even those who reject the view that perceptual experience has any contents – like Martin (2002) and Campbell (2002) – would agree that perception justifies PDBs.

I'll now outline the circumstances under which we form PDBs by taking a short cognitive scientific detour. This will allow us to understand more clearly the sense in which perception justifies belief in ordinary objects. The story I present offers empirical support for the remarks made above by Korman, Hofweber, and Byrne. Moreover, my account motivates the premises of the perceptual argument, which I will discuss in Sects. 3–5.

Our perceptual apparatus divides our perceptual field into *visual objects* (cf. Palmer, 1999, ch. 7; Pylyshyn, 2006, p. 173; Carey, 2009, pp. 69–87; Dickie, 2010; Murez & Recanati, 2016). When we attend to visual objects, our perceptual apparatus delivers an array of information about their shape, size, color, and so on. Some of this information changes from moment to moment, but other pieces of perceptual information remain stable over time. When we look at round rocks from a sharp angle, there's a sense in which such rocks 'look' elliptical. We tend not to form beliefs like <That's elliptical> under these circumstances, for there's also a sense in which such rocks 'look' round the entire time; so, we just believe <That's round>. Since this latter type of information corresponds to the well-studied phenomenon of perceptual constancy, call it *constancy information* (cf. Cohen, 2015; Burge, 2022, ch. 2).⁷

Suppose we're looking at a tall, brown tree. We form PDBs like <That's tall> and <That's brown> on the basis of the constancy information our perceptual apparatus delivers under such circumstances. Moreover, we *directly coordinate* PDBs formed on the basis of a single perceptual link with a visual object (cf. Campbell, 1988; Dickie, 2015, ch. 3; Clarke, 2022). That is, we assume that <That's tall> and <That's brown> are about the same object without explicitly forming some further belief like <That₁ is identical to that₂>.

Say that we treat a visual object X as if it corresponds to a single composite thing when we (a) form PDBs like <That's C> on the basis of the C-ness constancy information our perceptual apparatus delivers when linked with X, and (b) directly coordinate those PDBs. Treating visual objects as if they correspond to composite objects is one of our most foundational perception-based belief-forming strategies. So if perception *prima facie* justifies any PDBs at all – again, as virtually all philosophers of mind contend – then perception justifies PDBs formed by way of treating visual objects as if they correspond to composite objects. Thus, my assumption that perception justifies PDBs amounts to the claim that we're justifiably permitted to treat visual objects as if they correspond to composite objects.⁸

I'll now illustrate how this claim entails that perception justifies beliefs about the existence and persistence of ordinary things. First, perception justifies PDBs like <That's round and gray> in paradigmatic cases of perceptual contact with (say) a rock-induced visual object. We can infer <There's something round and gray> from <That's round and gray>, and the latter belief transmits its justification to the former.

⁷ For more on the philosophical implications of constancy, see Burge (2009) and Schulte (2021). I make no commitment to the claim that perceptual constancies mark the divide between perceiving and mere sensing, à la Burge.

⁸ I discuss the circumstances under which we lose whatever justification we would otherwise possess for treating visual objects as if they correspond to composite objects in Sect. 4.1.

So, through a trivial inferential step, perception justifies beliefs about the existence of objects.

Now suppose we're looking at a moving rock. When we do so, our perceptual apparatus delivers a single piece of moving-information, allowing us to justifiably believe<That's moving>. Since perception delivers a single piece of information over time, and not multiple pieces of information, we can thereby infer<That survives over the course of its motion>. And from this belief we can infer<There's something that survives over the course of its motion>. Whatever justification we have for <That's moving>transfers to <There's something that survives over the course of its motion>. So perception justifies beliefs about the persistence of objects.

Perception similarly justifies beliefs concerning when objects cease to exist. Absent major environmental changes, we can indefinitely maintain selective attention to rocks. But suppose the rock we're looking at explodes into a million pieces – we see the rock's parts fly every which way, and those parts no longer arrange in such a way as to lead to the delivery of constancy information. So the visual object to which we previously attended and on whose basis we formed PDBs is gone. This permits us to believe<What I previously attended to no longer exists>.

We can justifiably believe that there's something round and gray before us that can survive moving through the air but cannot survive the complete dispersion of its parts. If we know what rocks are supposed to be, we can infer that the object of our perceptual experience is a rock.⁹ So perception puts us in a position to justifiably believe that there are rocks. The same story applies to other ordinary things, such as tigers and tables.

Rocks (and statues, tigers, etc.) look to have certain shapes, sizes, and colors, when seen from behind; when submerged in water; as we move around them; and so forth. Call the visual objects our perceptual apparatus generates in response to such arrangements of matter *ordinary visual objects*. When we attend to ordinary visual objects, perception delivers an array of constancy information that remains stable across a wide variety of circumstances. This provides us with justification for treating ordinary visual objects as if they correspond to single composite objects. And this permits us to justifiably believe in ordinary things.¹⁰

⁹ Experience permits us to form PDBs about rocks like <That's moving>, <That's round and gray>, and <That went out of existence> even if we don't possess the concept [ROCK]; [ROCK] merely plays the role of enabling us to conclude that such PDBs are about rocks. I take it that this is an abductive inference – we perceive something round and gray which can survive motion but not the total dispersion of its parts, and [ROCK] better captures this description than any competitor concept. For more on the role that concepts play in experience, see Sect. 4.2 and the citations collected in footnote 17.

¹⁰ *Ontological eliminativists* – those who maintain that (most) ordinary objects don't exist – might reply that our perception-based object beliefs have defeaters. (For defenses of eliminativism, see Van Inwagen, 1990; Merricks, 2001; Sider, 2013; Contessa, 2014; and Builes, 2022). For instance, some claim we're no longer justifiably permitted to countenance ordinary things on perception's basis upon recognizing that our experiences as of ordinary things would remain the same whether or not there were ordinary things (cf. Merricks, 2001, 2017; Sattig, 2017; Brenner, 2023). Others maintain that our perception-based object beliefs are explanatorily disconnected from the object facts (cf. Korman, 2014, 2019; Fairchild & Hawthorne, 2018, Sect. 3; Bagwell, 2021; Egeland, 2022; Gładziejewski, 2023).

I grant that if any such defeater were successful, then we would lose whatever justification we possess for treating visual objects as if they correspond to composite objects. But I won't attempt to respond to such defeaters herein; I simply assume that we're justifiably permitted to treat visual objects as if they corre-

I've now explained and defended the claim that perception allows us to justifiably believe in ordinary things. I further maintain that the perceptual story I've outlined in this section allows us to justifiably *repudiate* extraordinary things (like trogs and incars). In particular, this story allows us to motivate and defend the perceptual argument, an argument that issues in the nonexistence of extraordinary objects. I will now defend the perceptual argument.

3 Introducing the perceptual argument

Incars – if they exist – are objects essentially co-located with cars inside of garages, objects which shrink and pop out of existence as cars exit garages. Now recall premise (E1) of the perceptual argument:

(E1) If we should see incars but we don't, then there are no incars.

When I say that we should see incars, I mean that we would expect to see incars given how they're described; I'll sometimes articulate this by saying that our perceptual apparatus is "well-poised" to detect incars. In turn, premise (E1) articulates a near incontrovertible principle about perceptual experience: if there's something in front of us that our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect, then provided we're in good lighting and have had a restful night's sleep, we'd see it; otherwise, no such thing is before us. If cars exist, for instance, then cars are large entities that make loud noises when we start them up. Cars are just the sorts of entities that our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect. If we nevertheless fail to see a car immediately before us, we should conclude that there is no car before us.

So suppose that (E1)'s antecedent is true. Thus, our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect incars when we look at cars inside of and exiting garages. Since our perceptual apparatus is so poised, we should see incars if there are any. But (we're supposing) we don't see incars. Absent some claim to the effect that we're systematically unlucky in our perceptual efforts, we should conclude that there are no incars before us when we look at cars inside of and exiting garages. This reasoning applies each time we attempt to seek out incars.

Now recall (E2):

(E2) We don't see incars.

Premise (E2) is antecedently plausible – we saw permissivists express sympathy with (E2) in the introduction. To clarify and defend it, I'll now say more.

Incars – if they exist – cease to exist as the cars with which they're co-located exit garages. When we watch cars leaving garages, our perceptual apparatus delivers a

spond to composite objects, and thus that no such defeaters are successful. Those who maintain that some such defeater is successful, then, should read what follows as my arguing for the claim that *if* perception justifies belief in ordinary things, *then* perception justifies disbelief in extraordinary things. This claim's antecedent is highly plausible. Whether it survives the relevant defeaters is a question for another time. (Cf. Korman, 2015, chs. 7, 11; and Hofweber, 2019 for responses to these sorts of defeaters.)

piece of moving-information on whose basis we can form the belief<That's moving>, from which we can infer<That survives over the course of its motion>. So perception allows us to justifiably form PDBs about entities with car-like persistence conditions. But when environmental conditions are normal, our perceptual apparatus delivers no shrinking-information on whose basis we might come to believe things like <That's shrinking> or <That went out of existence>. So perception doesn't allow us to justifiably form PDBs about entities with incar-like persistence conditions.¹¹ I'll defend (E2) further in Sect. 4.

Now recall (E3):

(E3) We should see incars.

Again, (E3) amounts to the claim that our perceptual apparatus is set up in such a way as to detect incars, provided that no epistemic funny business is afoot. I'll defend (E3) further in Sect. 5.

Note that (E3) doesn't rely on the claim that perception serves as our only means of justifying ontological beliefs. Scientific investigation provides us with evidence for the existence of quarks and galaxies. And perhaps philosophical argumentation provides us with evidence for the existence of, for example, propositions. Plausibly, propositions aren't the sorts of entities we would expect to perceptually detect. Incars, I claim, are different. For incars, if they exist, are mid-sized material entities that shrink and eventually pop out of existence as cars exit garages. Once we've described what it is to be an incar, we should recognize that an incar is just the sort of entity we're disposed to perceive.

From (E1)-(E3), it follows that:

(E4) There are no incars.

Replace 'incar' with 'trog' and the argument runs just the same. Thus, if the perceptual argument is sound, then there are no extraordinary mid-sized dry goods.

I've now explained and motivated the perceptual argument's premises. I take it that few wish to deny (E1).¹² By contrast, there are several ways for one to object to (E2) and (E3). In Sects. 4, 5, I'll further motivate (E2) and (E3) and defend against such objections.

4 Defending (E2)

Recall (E2):

¹¹ Sometimes, garages are lit so strangely as to make it appear as if something shrinks when cars exit them. These are abnormal circumstances – whatever justification we have for treating the relevant visual object as if it corresponds to a single thing undergoes defeat once we recognize the nature of our circumstances.

¹² I can envision one objection to (E1) that rests on ground I cover in defending (E2) and (E3); I discuss this objection in Sect. 6.

(E2) We don't see incars (/trog).

In this section, I'll consider two objections to (E2). First, one might claim that we see extraordinary things in the sense outlined in Sect. 2. And second, one might claim that we see extraordinary things in some other relevant sense of 'seeing'.

4.1 Seeing trogs

Alex Byrne and Riccardo Manzotti claim that we're sometimes perceptually aware of spatiotemporally discontinuous objects like trogs (they say nothing of incars). They write:

...[S]ometimes gerrymandered objects *do* appear "as one." A pencil sharpener, stapler, Post-it notes, pencils, and other office paraphernalia scattered on a desk form a gerrymandered object... Imagine that the sharpener, stapler, and so on start moving together, like a flock of birds. Phenomenologically, in addition to the *plurality* – the sharpener, stapler, ... – there is also a *singularity* – the office-supply-*"flock"* (2022, p. 342).

Thus, Byrne & Manzotti might claim that we sometimes undergo experiences that justify belief in gerrymandered objects like trogs. That is, they might reject (E2) on the grounds that we see trogs in the sense of Sect. 2.

I reply that these sorts of experiences fail to justify belief in mereologically scattered objects. To see why, first recall that the visual objects corresponding to composite objects like rocks remain stable across a wide variety of circumstances – this, at least in part, explains why we're justifiably permitted to treat rock-induced visual objects as if they correspond to single composite objects.

Other visual objects behave far less coherently. Take, for instance, *floaters*, "... small dark shapes that float across your vision... [which] can look like spots, threads, squiggly lines, or even little cobwebs" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Floaters appear and disappear across our visual field relatively randomly; sometimes they stay in place as we turn our heads, and other times they fade into nothing upon notice. Perhaps we're justified in believing <There's a round object before me> based on the roundness-information our perceptual apparatus delivers when linked with a round floater. We quickly lose whatever justification we would otherwise possess for so believing when floaters exhibit their characteristic odd behaviors. Thus, discovering that a visual object behaves in non-ordinary ways precludes us from treating it as if it corresponds to a composite object.

The same reasoning applies to flocks of birds.¹³ When we look at flocks from afar, they appear to move as a unit, to continuously change their shape, to bear a fairly uniform color, and so on. We're defeasibly entitled to treat the flock-induced visual

¹³ Compare with Brenner (2023, p. 74). Notice also that my present line of argumentation entails that we lack perceptual evidence for the existence of flocks (qua composite objects); it doesn't entail the nonexistence of flocks. To defend the nonexistence of flocks via (E1)-(E4) style reasoning, one would need to claim (i) that we should see flocks, and (ii) that if we should but fail to see flocks, then there are no flocks. I remain neutral on these points.

object as if it corresponds to a single thing. So we're justified in believing <That's brown> on the basis of the brownness-information our perceptual apparatus delivers when linked with this visual object.

But flock-induced visual objects behave differently than ordinary-object-induced visual objects. As we approach flocks, our perceptual apparatus divides our visual field into many visual objects, namely the birds themselves. And if we watch flocks for long enough, they exhibit behaviors that distinguish them from the visual objects for which it's definitely rational to employ our direct coordination strategies – flocks rapidly scatter and then recombine, or split into groups, or what have you. We can treat the visual object to which the flock corresponds as a unit for some amount of time, but certainly not over the same circumstances that we can treat the visual objects to which ordinary things correspond.

Upon discovering that this visual object is non-ordinary, we lose whatever justification we would otherwise possess for (i) forming beliefs like <That's brown> on the basis of the brownness-information our perceptual apparatus generates and (ii) directly coordinating such beliefs with other beliefs formed on the basis of the same perceptual link. So discovering that a visual object is non-ordinary undermines whatever justification we would otherwise possess for treating it as if it corresponds to a single composite object.

Thus, I accept that we sometimes see many objects 'as one'. But as with floaters and flocks, I reply that we lose whatever justification we have for treating the office-supply-flock-induced visual object as if it corresponds to a single thing once that visual object manifests non-ordinary behavior. If our initial experience was 'about' anything, it was about a plurality of objects, and it misattributed to them the kind of unity that ordinary things possess.¹⁴ I say the same of trogs.

Note that Byrne & Manzotti *assume* that there are gerrymandered objects and argue on this basis that we sometimes see gerrymandered objects (ibid., 340-2).¹⁵ But I have argued that we should reject their claim that we see gerrymandered objects. Further, if the perceptual argument is sound, we should reject the assumption that there are gerrymandered objects, as well as all other extraordinary moderate-sized specimens of dry goods.

4.2 Alternative senses of 'see'

My argument for (E2) rests on the claim that we fail to undergo experiences that justify belief in incars. Thus, my argument for (E2) appealed to the sense of 'seeing' outlined in Sect. 2. There are, of course, other senses of 'seeing' according to which one might claim that we can 'see incars', some of which I'll discuss momentarily. But first note that this is not yet an objection to (E2), nor to the perceptual argument more generally. To see why, recall (E1):

¹⁴ Moreover, it's unclear why Byrne & Manzotti's theory requires gerrymandered objects rather than mere pluralities of objects. It's plausible that we're often perceptually aware of multiple objects at once (cf. Alzahabi & Cain, 2021).

¹⁵ Byrne and Manzotti motivate the assumption that there are gerrymandered objects by appealing to considerations of parochialism. I maintain that the perceptual argument undermines such considerations; see Sect. 6.

(E1) If we should see incars but we don't, then there are no incars.

I motivated (E1) with the following thought: provided that no epistemic funny business is afoot, we would see a car if it was directly before us – for cars are just the sorts of entities our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect. If we fail to see a car before us, then, we should conclude that there is no car before us. Similar considerations apply to incars provided they're well-poised for perceptual detection.

The sense of 'seeing cars' on which (E1) – and thereby the rest of the perceptual argument – trades ought to give us reason to countenance cars, provided there's a car before us. The account of 'seeing' I outlined in Sect. 2 is just such a sense. This account is backed by decades of cognitive scientific research into object-seeing. Indeed, it's the standard sense in which one might say we 'see ordinary things'; this gives us reason to employ the account in our discussion. Furthermore, as I argued in Sect. 2, this account issues in the claim that perception allows us to justifiably believe in ordinary things. So I maintain that this is the sense on which (E1) – and thereby the rest of the perceptual argument – trades. I appealed to this sense when I defended (E2); I'll proceed similarly when I defend (E3) ("We should see incars") in Sect. 5.

One might nevertheless worry that if we can 'see incars' in another sense, then we should question the perceptual argument's conclusion ("There are no incars"). I reply that the alternative senses fail to issue in reasons to countenance incars, and thus fail to threaten the perceptual argument's conclusion. I'll now discuss two salient alternatives and show that neither provide us with reasons to countenance incars.

Consider a first sense in which one might claim we 'see incars' with an example due to Siegel (2006, p. 430). Suppose that we're looking in our fridge for mustard. We open the door, and we cannot see it. We close the door, open it once more, and voila – there it is. The mustard was there the entire time and we failed to register it, somehow-or-other. It's clear that we didn't 'see the mustard' on our first pass in the same sense we 'saw the mustard' on our second pass. Nevertheless, one might claim, there's a legitimate sense in which we 'saw the mustard' on our first pass. And as with bottles of French's, so with incars. Perhaps we 'see incars' in just the same way we see bottles of mustard when we fail to register them.

The sense in which we 'see' bottles of mustard when we fail to register them clearly lacks epistemic force. An experience where we fail to register the presence of mustard gives us no reason to believe that there's mustard before us. If we carefully deploy our selective attention onto the fridge's contents, of course, we *do* typically undergo experiences which permit us to justifiably believe things like <That's oval-ish and yellow>. But similar considerations fail to apply to incars. Try as we might to carefully deploy our selective attention onto cars inside of garages, we fail to undergo experiences which permit us to justifiably believe in incars.

Now consider a second sense. To be sure, the objector claims, our perceptual apparatus doesn't deliver constancy information corresponding to trogs or incars of its own accord. But when we bring the concept [INCAR] to mind, we can judge – on the basis of perception – whether or not environmental conditions are such there's anything in our environment that would fall under the extension of [INCAR]. We might say that we can 'detect' incars by bringing the concept [INCAR] to mind and

applying it on the basis of our perceptual knowledge of cars and their locations inside garages.

By comparison, consider a kind of entity called a ‘smartcar’. Smartcars, if they exist, are conscious objects essentially co-located with cars, who attempt in vain to square the circle from 9:00AM to 5:00PM and who, after their workday, repeat Townes Van Zandt’s “Pancho and Lefty” over and again in their minds until they drift into dreamland. If we grasp the concept [SMARTCAR], then we can recognize when environmental conditions are such that were there smartcars, *this* would be a situation where there’s a smartcar. This gives us reason to believe in smartcars only if we have prior reason to believe in smartcars – perception gives us no such reason. (And of course we can’t see smartcars; there are none.)

Similar remarks apply to incars. I grant that grasping [INCAR] allows us to recognize when environmental conditions are such that were there incars, *this* would be a situation where there’s an incar. This gives us reason to believe in incars only if we have antecedent reason to believe in incars – perception on its own gives us no such reason. So for perception to be of any use in locating incars, we must have antecedent reason to think that [INCAR] has a nonempty extension.¹⁶

There’s a relationship between this sense of ‘seeing’ and the sense I outlined in Sect. 2. With respect to ordinary things, our perceptual apparatus produces an ordinary visual object comprised of pieces of constancy information that allow us to track the properties of such objects. Some argue on this basis that attentional links with ordinary objects are “conceptually unmediated”.¹⁷ But perhaps linking up with certain objects requires conceptual mediation. One might think that when toddlers look at a hunk of clay that makes up a statue, they’re disposed to perceptually detect only the hunk – not the statue. To ‘see’ the statue in the sense I’ve been stressing, maybe toddlers must possess the concept [STATUE] and/or learn how to apply it to experience.

I grant that [STATUE] might play a role in our coming to see statues. For I suspect that our coming to see statues is an early instance of *perceptual learning*, whereby we enact “...long-lasting changes to how perceptual systems process stimuli, typically caused by repeated exposure to a stimulus-type over time” (Jenkin, 2023, p. 485).¹⁸ This process often occurs via the intentional allocation of attention (cf. Goldstone et al., 2011). If successful, it results in the creation of newer and more fine-grained perceptual units. So I grant that we might need to mediate our attention through [STATUE] to begin undergoing experiences that justify belief in statues.

¹⁶ Ontological deflationists think that conceptual and/or linguistic analysis gives us reason to believe that the extension of [INCAR] is nonempty. For instance, Thomasson (2015) maintains that we can introduce the term ‘incar’ in such a way that “There are incars” is guaranteed to be true. And Hirsch (2010) argues that we can use expressions like ‘there are’ in such a way that “There are incars” is guaranteed to be true. I set these concerns to the side in what follows. Almost every permissivist (with Thomasson as a notable exception) maintains that conceptual analysis is ill-suited to metaphysical inquiry. Furthermore, the perceptual argument renders these deflationary views suspect.

¹⁷ Cf. Campbell (2002, ch. 4) and Dickie (2010, 2015, p. 158).

¹⁸ Cf. Gibson (1963), Goldstone and Byrge (2015), Landers (2021), Burge (2022, ch. 18), and Connolly and Prettyman (2024).

The role that [STATUE] plays, however, is limited. Philosophers of perception now frequently observe that concepts have a less sizable influence in shaping perceptual experience than previously thought.¹⁹ For example, Tyler Burge writes:

Any perceptual state can be generated computationally without any concept's or propositional state's figuring in the computation. Formation of perceptual representations does not depend essentially on conceptual resources... [T]he perceptual-level initiations of attention and their effect on perception, the task dependence of perception on conative states, and so on, can be computationally explained without reference to conceptual or propositional input (Burge, 2022, p. 13).

So suppose we must mediate our attention through [STATUE] to begin undergoing experiences that justify belief in statues. Even so, deploying [STATUE] isn't *required* to undergo such experiences. The squashing of a hunk of clay that constitutes a statue can sever our perceptual link with that hunk, but other times it doesn't.²⁰ If our perceptual link persists through the squashing, then we're attending to the hunk; otherwise, we're attending to the statue. This merely shows that the severance of an attentional link doesn't always result from the disappearance of constancy information. When the squashing of a hunk severs our perceptual link, our perceptual apparatus continues to deliver certain pieces of shape, size, and color information corresponding to the hunk. But our link was specifically keyed to statue-esque information – that's why our link was severed.

Seeing statues might involve [STATUE] in a limited sense. This is no objection to (E2). The concept [INCAR] has been in the ontologist's repertoire for roughly 40 years, and we don't see incars. And try as we might to deploy [INCAR] as we look upon garaged cars, this fails to result in the generation of any experiences on whose basis we could justifiably believe in an object co-located with a car that shrinks out of existence. Say whatever you want to say about how concepts are involved in 'seeing statues' – such conceptual considerations fail to issue in reasons to countenance incars.²¹

Having shown that these alternative senses of 'seeing' fail to provide us with reasons to countenance incars, I reiterate that my argument trades on the sense I outlined in Sect. 2. Given that this is the sense on which the perceptual argument trades, (E3) amounts to the claim that when we look at cars in garages, we should (at least sometimes) undergo experiences that permit us to believe in incars. I'll now defend (E3).

¹⁹ This is widely accepted among philosophers of perception (if not ontologists). Compare Burge's quote with Campbell (2002), Carey (2009), Dickie (2010), Siegel (2010), and Recanati (2012).

²⁰ Cf. Dickie (2014, p. 41): "...it is if, but only if, you are attending to the piece of metal of which the chair is made, rather than to the chair itself, that your attentional link will remain intact through a change that the piece of metal but not the chair survives." See also Burge (2022, p. 188, fn. 181). Not everyone agrees; see Madden (2019) for criticism.

²¹ If you're worried that we haven't worked hard enough at 'seeing incars', see Sects. 5.2 and 6.

5 Defending (E3)

Incars are mid-sized dry goods, material objects just as large, loud, and heavy as cars. Ordinary ontologists sometimes draw attention to this fact. Daniel Korman characterizes permissivism as a view according to which “...there are wide swaths of *highly visible* extraordinary objects, right before our eyes, that ordinarily escape our notice” (2015, p. 13, my italics). And Eli Hirsch defines revisionary ontology as a family of views according to which “[m]any common sense judgements about the existence or identity of *highly visible* objects are a priori necessarily false” (2002, p. 107, my italics). Ordinary ontologists seem to take this observation only as evidence of permissivism’s strangeness. I’ll argue that it gives us reason to endorse (E3):

(E3) We should see incars.

To that end, I’ll first defend (E3) in greater detail. After that, I’ll respond to the objection that certain differences between incars and ordinary things should make us doubt (E3).

5.1 Andy and Minnie

Suppose that there’s a large, metallic object located in a garage – call it ‘Minnie’. Minnie, if it exists, is an incar. It’s about fifteen feet long, and under the garage’s fluorescent beam one can appreciate its gold finish. Minnie weighs a little over two tons. Its adhesives emanate a glue-like odor; it’s warm to the touch and knocks the nearby shelving units asunder as it rumbles. Suddenly, Minnie moves backwards. Its rear-most parts begin to disappear as it passes under the garage doorway. This proceeds in a continuous gradation – the object gets smaller and smaller as it loses further parts. At this end of this process, Minnie has ceased to exist.

Minnie behaves in a remarkably similar fashion to other entities that perception gives us reason to countenance. Imagine a log passed through the blade of a wood-chipper. As we watch this process unfold, our perceptual apparatus delivers a piece of shrinking-information on whose basis we can justifiably form beliefs like <That’s shrinking> and <That popped out of existence>. Or imagine whittling a thick blade down into a paring knife. Minute-by-minute, our perceptual apparatus detects the blade becoming smaller; this permits us to form analogous PDBs. When objects lose parts, our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect this change, and it delivers suitable information in turn. So too does Minnie go out of existence by shedding parts.

While Minnie is inside of a garage, Minnie is co-located with a car. This should be no barrier to our seeing Minnie in the relevant sense. We can see statues in the sense outlined in Sects. 2 and 4.2, for the squashing of a hunk of clay sometimes severs our perceptual link with the hunk; this permits us to justifiably believe in an object that goes out of existence upon squashing. Again, maybe we must possess the concept [STATUE] to begin undergoing such experiences. We nevertheless undergo experiences which justify belief in statues.

Minnie is a moderate-sized material object with a determinate shape, size, and color. As it exits the garage, it sheds parts. So described, Minnie is an appropriate candidate for perceptual detection. We should see Minnie. Minnie is an incar. I conclude that (E3) is true.

My argument for (E3) proceeds similarly vis-à-vis trogs. Let ‘Andy’ name the mereological sum of my childhood dog André (rest his soul) and the tree trunk in my backyard – ‘Trunky’ – on which he would sometimes snooze. If Andy exists, then Andy is a trog. Further, Andy is a moderate-sized dry good. And when I carve “I love incars” into Trunky’s side, Andy loses parts.

Andy is a spatially discontinuous object. So are ordinary things – indeed, permissivists sometimes brandish this fact against ordinary ontologists. Maegan Fairchild and John Hawthorne write:

[T]he table does not seem to have spatially disconnected parts, but the flock does. It seems superficially as if one can draw a line from any bit of the table to any other bit of the table without straying outside of the table, but one can’t draw a line from any bird in the flock to any other bird without straying outside of the flock. But, of course, when we look at the table under a microscope, we realize that this contrast is illusory (2018, p. 69).

I’ve already said my piece on flocks. My present point is that there’s lots of empty space between the atoms that make up tables, and we nevertheless see tables. So spatial discontinuity cannot be what makes for our inability to see Andy.

I spent most of my time hanging out with André indoors and only occasionally deigned to mark Trunky as an object of singular thought. Thus, Andy was rarely “in full view”. This isn’t enough to show that Andy could exist and forever evade perceptual detection – André’s heart and lungs were never “in full view” either. Indeed, we typically only see the surfaces of ordinary objects, and yet we still undergo experiences that justify their existence.²²

When my family and I took André on a vacation, Andy continued to exist (if Andy existed at all) in a highly discontinuous form. Indeed, given how we’ve characterized Andy, it makes sense that Andy would almost always escape our sight. So I shouldn’t expect to see Andy when my family, André, and I are on vacation. Nor do I hold any hope of seeing *André* “in his entirety” when his tail gets stuck in the dog door; nor would I expect to see my pet rock when it’s nestled in my bookbag. External environmental circumstances often preclude us from perceiving ordinary objects in our immediate vicinity. This doesn’t show that we wouldn’t see such-and-such objects in favorable environmental conditions. We don’t always undergo experiences that allow us to justifiably believe in dogs, but we often do.

Similar remarks to apply to Andy. That is, we would expect to *at least sometimes* undergo experiences that permit us to justifiably believe in Andy. Most obviously, we would expect to undergo such experiences if both André and Trunky were right in front of us, as “in full view” as they could possibly be. Andy, after all, is a large material object that reflects light in all the familiar ways. Mereological sums are cer-

²² Cf. Hofweber (2019, pp. 36–7).

tainly unfamiliar, but this too easily masks the fact that they remain moderate-sized specimens of dry goods.

5.2 Perceptual learning

Certain differences between incars and ordinary things might seem to place pressure on (E3) (“We should see incars”). Vision scientists agree that an object’s location plays a central role in activating mechanisms for perceptual selection (cf. Treisman, 1996; Pashler, 1999).²³ We identify an object’s location by means of that object’s boundary and shape. When cars leave garages, incars change shape in accordance with the locations of garage doorways. By comparison, the car’s shape continues to stand out from the rest of our environment. Thus, we might suspect the car’s shape ‘crowds out’ the incar’s shape.

We’re undoubtedly disposed to notice the car’s shape more often than we notice sub-portions of its surface. This isn’t enough to resist (E3); rather, one must show that our perceptual apparatus is incapable of detecting the shifting sub-portion that would otherwise correspond to Minnie’s shape. This is implausible. First note that we perceptually detect sub-portions of objects all the time, with face-perception as perhaps the most striking example (cf. Tsao & Livingstone, 2008). More generally, we can allocate our attention to sub-portions of ours’ and others’ bodies (think of how we calculate our positions under umbrellas to avoid soaking our bookbags).

Suppose that Minnie is halfway outside of the garage. We can identify which parts of the mass of metal belong to Minnie (if it exists) and which don’t. It may be vague whether certain atoms are among Minnie’s parts – it’s also vague whether a loose hair is among my cat’s parts. By intentionally allocating our attention to the portion of the car underneath the garage, we can track Minnie’s shape. This is plausibly what we’re doing when we deploy the concept [INCAR] while looking at a car inside of a garage.

I’ve argued that we can track Minnie’s shape via attentional allocation, perhaps via mediation through our [INCAR] concept. This is just the conceptual sense of ‘seeing’ I discussed in Sect. 4.2, one on which I argued the perceptual argument doesn’t trade. I still maintain this. As I noted there, however, there’s a relationship between these two senses of ‘seeing’. Through perceptual learning processes – specifically those related to attentional allocation – we can enact the creation of perceptual units. Again, I suspect that this is how we come to undergo experiences which justify belief in statues; we initially mediate our attention via [STATUE], after which our perceptual apparatus learns to spontaneously engage in specific forms of attentional allocation.²⁴

Nothing prevents us from perceptually learning to track Minnie’s shape. Indeed, perceptual learning operates across an impressive variety of domains. We learn to visually unite individual chess pieces into available moves (cf. Chase & Simon, 1973); we learn to chunk individual letters into complete words (cf. O’Hara, 1980);

²³ For discussion, see Campbell (2002, ch. 1.5) and Burge (2022, ch. 18).

²⁴ Siegel (2010) argues that the contents of our visual experiences of pine trees change once we learn the concept [PINE TREE]. I make a weaker claim, one which doesn’t concern the contents of experience. Rather, my claim concerns the pieces of information our perceptual apparatus delivers, and the corresponding patterns of attention we develop, in response to environmental stimuli post-perceptual training.

we learn to perceptually discriminate dog breeds from one another (cf. Diamond & Carey, 1986). It would be epistemically arbitrary to grant that perceptual learning is an effective mechanism in so many other domains while denying that it would be an effective mechanism for detecting Minnie's shape – we track the shapes of portions of things in relation to other things all the time.

I do not claim that we can perceptually learn to detect all sub-portions of composite objects. Perhaps I cannot learn to perceptually process the shape of my cat's nose plus some gerrymandered portion of her back-left foot. But tracking Minnie shouldn't prove so tricky. Minnie (if it exists) is a mid-sized dry good, one that shrinks out of existence in a smooth, continuous motion with respect to another highly visible object. And perceptual learning processes are well-attuned to the mid-sized material domain.

Just under a decade ago, Eli Hirsch gifted me with the concept [INCAR]. I soon found myself performing strange experiments as I set upon my morning commute; I would look at my garaged car and attempt to shift between seeing it *as* a car and *as* an incar. (I sometimes repeat this exercise; it's a nice mindfulness activity.) Of course, as per (E2), my non-conceptually-laden experiences remained the same. I – and everyone else who possesses the concept [INCAR] – fail to spontaneously undergo perceptual experiences which justify belief in incars. We would nevertheless expect to undergo such experiences. Perceptual learning mechanisms should issue in the spontaneous tracking of constancy information corresponding to Minnie's shape.

6 Parochialism

In Sect. 2, I argued that perception justifies belief in ordinary things. In Sects. 3–5, I argued that the justificatory story undergirding our perception-based beliefs allows us to motivate and defend the perceptual argument. I conclude that there are trees and cars, but no trops or incars. Therefore, I endorse ordinary ontology. Given the nature of the perceptual argument, this conclusion is limited to mid-sized dry goods, the sorts of things we would expect to see. My conclusion is no less powerful for that. Objections to ordinary ontology uniformly focus on the ontological status of mid-sized dry goods.²⁵

Now consider perhaps the most prominent objection to ordinary ontology: the idea that it's *arbitrary* and/or *parochial*. Richard Cartwright explicitly levies this objection against ordinary ontology, writing: “[it's difficult] to say what sort or kind of object [a scattered object] is. But it is not clear to me that this is indicative of anything more than a paucity of readily available schemes of classification, a paucity resulting from quite parochial concerns of human beings” (1987, p. 183). Yablo (1987, p. 307), Sider (2001, pp. 156–7), and Byrne and Manzotti (2022, Sect. 4) rely on similar lines of thought. And Fairchild and Hawthorne suggest that ontologists should therefore be in the business of formulating and defending *general principles*:

²⁵ Cf. Korman (2020, Sect. 4).

[O]ur metaphysical views are, at least in part, driven by a preference for powerful general principles. In this respect, we see metaphysics as very much like other fundamental sciences – in each case general principles provide compelling candidate explanations for a wealth of data. Parity considerations, as well as physics itself, thicken the ontological data vis-à-vis that provided by a common-sense inspection of the world (Fairchild & Hawthorne, 2018, p. 73).

In turn, permissivists have addressed the ontological status of extraordinary things via conceptual-philosophical interventions. Thus Amie Thomasson argues for permissivism by “[introducing] new or technical terms in ways that permit easy arguments for the existence of their referents, enabling us to make easy arguments for the existence of mereological sums... Hirsch’s incars... and so on” (Thomasson, 2015, p. 214). Thus Theodore Sider argues for permissivism by claiming that there can be no borderline cases of composition (cf. Sider, 2001, Chap. 4).²⁶ Thus Maegan Fairchild and John Hawthorne argue for permissivism by claiming that it would be objectionably arbitrary to countenance islands but not incars.²⁷

Permissivists sometimes motivate the need for a powerful general principle by having us consider the possibility of creatures with alternative perceptual constitutions. Consider *Tablers*, creatures whose “...perceptual systems make it seem that when particles are arranged tablewise, they compose an object, but when particles are arranged chairwise, they don’t” (Fairchild & Hawthorne, 2018, p. 58). Similarly, we can imagine *Troglodytes* – creatures whose experiences permit them to justifiably believe in objects with trog-like existence and persistence conditions (cf. Korman, 2015, pp. 200–2) – and *Incritters* – creatures with a perceptual apparatus that delivers shrinking-information as they watch cars leaving garages. Given the possibility of these creatures, the thought goes, why place such epistemic weight on human perception in coming to ontological conclusions? “To insist on the credentials of the things we recognize against those which others do, or might,” Stephen Yablo writes, “seems indefensibly parochial. In metaphysics, unusual hypothetical coloring can be no ground for exclusion” (1987, p. 307). Better then to proceed by way of formulating and defending powerful general principles concerning composition and coincidence, claims the permissivist.

The possibility of such creatures is a red herring. The possibility of *Tablers* gives us no reason to repudiate chairs, so the possibility of *Troglodytes* and *Incritters* gives us no reason to countenance trogs and incars. But the point cuts deeper than this. The perceptual argument doesn’t show that it’s categorically impossible to undergo the sorts of experiences that *Troglodytes* and *Incritters* undergo. The argument shows that given how extraordinary things are described – namely, as moderate-sized specimens of dry goods – *we would expect ourselves to undergo such experiences* (in well-lit backyards and garages). And even if we don’t presently see incars, we would expect to develop such a capacity by submitting the concept [INCAR] to standard perceptual learning processes. These processes nevertheless fail to issue in our seeing incars – ditto for trogs. *We* should be *Troglodytes* and *Incritters*, yet we are not.

²⁶ Cf. Merricks (2005) and Barnes (2007).

²⁷ Cf. Hawthorne (2006, vii), Korman (2015, ch. 8), and Fairchild and Hawthorne (2018).

Perhaps permissivists would grant (E2) – “We don’t see incars” – and (E3) – “We should see incars” – but reject (E1) – “If we should see incars but we don’t, then there are no incars” – on the grounds that our present failure to see incars is due to lack of adequate training.²⁸ I’ve said nothing that precludes this maneuver outright. Maybe with a more rigorous training program in tow, one can develop the capacity to spontaneously detect incar-like information. Granted, I find it implausible that such a training program exists. We ontologists have had the concept [INCAR] for forty years and still we fail to see incars. I endorse (E2) partially on the strength of this observation. But I remain open to falsification: just as I should. The perceptual argument demonstrates that the existence of incars is an empirical matter. Those sympathetic to the prospects of ‘seeing incars’ must agree.

Permissivists have assumed that perception is silent on the existence of incars, and thus that the existence of incars is not an empirical matter. Recall Fairchild and Hawthorne’s claim, quoted in the introduction, that “...permissivism is itself neutral about [whether we ‘see incars’]” (2018, p. 46).²⁹ This assumption sometimes even plays a role in how permissivists characterize their positions. Consider how Matti Eklund characterizes *maximalism* (a form of radical permissivism): “What maximalism says is that for any type of object such that there can be objects of that type *given that the empirical facts are exactly what they are*, there are such objects” (2008, p. 391, my emphasis).³⁰ As stated, maximalism leads to surprising ontological results only if perception fails to give us evidence for the nonexistence of extraordinary things. (To illustrate: as I have argued, there can be no such objects as incars given that the empirical facts are exactly what they are.) Of course, not all permissivists characterize their positions in terms of empirical consistency.³¹ I maintain that these versions of permissivism are not trivial but merely false – for we should not believe in material objects well-poised for perceptual detection that we forever fail to see.

The fact that perceptual experience takes a stand on the existence of incars leads to another important upshot for ordinary ontology: it allows ordinary ontologists to relinquish whatever duty one might’ve thought we possessed in producing a powerful general principle which allows cars and disallows incars. Consider an analogy. Suppose that two associates – Angle and Bangle – are lost in the woods. When Angle looks in the direction of a nearby meadow, he sees a pine snake but he fails to see the Jersey Devil. Now imagine the following exchange:

- *ANGLE*: There’s a pine snake right before me, but there’s no Jersey Devil right before me.

²⁸ In what follows, everything I say vis-à-vis incars also applies to trogs.

²⁹ Fairchild and Hawthorne (2018, p. 47) say also that common sense takes no stand on the existence of incars. Thomasson (2007, p. 183) concurs.

³⁰ Compare with Merricks (2001, p. 9) and Sider (2001, pp. 75–6) on which ontological debates we ought to count as ‘straightforwardly empirical’.

³¹ Fairchild, for instance, characterizes permissivism as the combination of *universal composition* (“For any *xs*, there exists a *z* such that *z* fuses the *xs*” (2019, p. 169) and *global plentitude* (“Necessarily, given any material object *o* and any nonlocally closed modal profile *M* based on all of *o*’s neutral properties, there is something coincident with *o* which has *M*” (2019, p. 163). These theses do not obviously appeal to empirical consistency.

- *BANGLE*: You're being objectionably arbitrary. On what grounds can you simultaneously countenance a pine snake while repudiating the Jersey Devil?
- *ANGLE*: Well, for one thing, I can see the pine snake *right there*, but I see no Jersey Devil.
- *BANGLE*: Now you're being objectionably parochial! What's so special about the human perceptual apparatus? Consider the possibility of *Devilites*, creatures who undergo experiences that present them with both pine-snake-like and Jersey-Devil-like information when they look in the direction you're looking. They'd say that there's *both* a pine snake *and* a Jersey Devil right before them!
- *ANGLE*: Why does that matter?
- *BANGLE*: I'm suggesting that without some powerful general principle that explains why there's a pine snake but no Jersey Devil before you, you shouldn't be so confident in the deliverances of your perceptual apparatus.

Bangle is simply misguided. Angle has an obvious reply; the existence of the Jersey Devil is an empirical matter. The Jersey Devil is a large, feathery biped with wings and hooves. Thus, if there's a Jersey Devil right before us, we should see it. If we don't see it, then it doesn't exist. We need no powerful ontological principle to reach this conclusion. And the possibility of Devilites is entirely irrelevant to the present issue.

Devilites are epistemically tragic creatures. So are Incritters. And the fact that Incritters 'see incars' around atoms arranged car-inside-of-a-garage-wise – while Devilites 'see Jersey Devils' even when there are no atoms arranged Devil-wise – lacks epistemic relevance. If a Jersey Devil or an incar is directly before us, then we should undergo an experience that permits us to justifiably countenance such an object (in well-lit meadows and garages). Thus our failure to undergo such an experience constitutes evidence that no such object is before us. We ought then maintain that both Devilites and Incritters undergo hallucinatory experiences – each seems to see an object that is not before them. Devilites hallucinate a Jersey Devil where there are trees and blades of grass; Incritters hallucinate an incar where there is a car.

Given that the existence of incars is an empirical matter, it's just as inappropriate to settle whether incars exist by appealing to ornate philosophical argumentation or conceptual analysis as it would be inappropriate to settle whether the Jersey Devil exists via philosophical argumentation or conceptual analysis. This is the permissivist's fundamental error. Permissivists have assumed that one must appeal to extra-perceptual resources to settle the ontological status of incars. No such appeal is necessary; indeed, my ordinary ontologist finds the permissivist's conceptual-philosophical interventions highly unusual. Incars are just the sorts of entities our perceptual apparatus is well-poised to detect – namely, moderate-sized specimens of dry goods – and still we fail to see them. So there are no incars: the matter is settled. We need no powerful ontological principle to reach this conclusion. And the possibility of Incritters is entirely irrelevant to the present issue.

Here, then, is a crucial upshot of the perceptual argument: the charges of arbitrariness and parochialism often levied against ordinary ontologists rest on a mistake. The ontological status of extraordinary material things is an empirical matter, one subject to standard norms of empirical inquiry. Thus our failing to see trogs and

incars constitutes conclusive evidence of their nonexistence. This is a straightforward consequence of their being mid-sized dry goods.

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